



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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**State Health Department Warns Parents and Educators
About the Dangers of the “Choking Game”**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health is warning parents and educators to be on the lookout for a dangerous and potentially deadly activity among younger teens, commonly called the “choking game.”

The game has many names, such as pass out, dream game, blackout, ghost and flatliner, but the goal is always the same – to cut off the supply of oxygen to the brain until the person passes out. The lack of oxygen and the subsequent rush of oxygen back to the brain cause a euphoric drug-like rush that can be addictive.

Many children play this game in groups, but some may crave it so badly they play the game alone, using things found around the house like bed sheets, dog leashes, belts and shoestrings. The game is dangerous for anyone, but when played alone, accidental strangulation death may be the tragic end result.

“This game isn’t new; it’s been around for decades,” said Dorcas Kunkel, a nurse with the Department of Health’s Division of Injury Prevention and Control. “The kids who participate in this behavior are generally ages 9 to 14. Many pre-teens and teens participate in this lethal game out of curiosity – not rebellion, depression or anger. To many children, the choking game seems like a harmless way to get a rush. Unfortunately, it can be deadly.”

Children do not appreciate the potential health risks associated with repeated oxygen deprivation. The choking game can cause fainting, bruising, concussions, headaches, brain damage and even death.

“As parents, we sometimes think that things like this don’t happen in North Dakota, but I can emphatically say that they do,” said Dr. Craig Lambrecht, chief field medical officer for the

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North Dakota Department of Health and an emergency physician with Medcenter One Health Systems, Bismarck, N.D. “Unfortunately, I have treated several children over the years who have come to the emergency room with injuries from the ‘choking game.’ I encourage all parents to discuss this dangerous behavior with their children and to watch for warning signs that their children may be participating.”

Parents and educators are encouraged to look for the following clues that a child might be experimenting with the choking game:

- Recurrent headaches
- Bloodshot or red eyes
- Raspy breath
- Unusual marks on neck or upper torso
- Belts and ropes with unusual knots found in the child's bedroom and tied to furniture or other fixtures such as closet pole

For more information about the choking game, contact Dorcas Kunkel, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.4536 or 800.472.2286 (press 1). Parents who are concerned that their child might be participating in this high-risk behavior are encouraged to seek services from their physician or a mental health professional.

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